



The Corps Engages: Defending Baltimore

FROM the Civil War to the end of the 19th century the Corps of Engineers concentrated on river and harbor projects. Congress kept appropriations for seacoast fortifications small. But in 1898, on the eve of war with Spain, the Corps mobilized its civil works organization for defense.

In Baltimore, Md., one of the nation's major commercial centers at the time, the Corps hurriedly built gun emplacements for partially constructed batteries from the mouth of the Patapsco River to the city's Inner Harbor.

During the spring of 1898 crews worked double shifts pouring concrete and mounting guns to protect the harbor. By June the battery at North Point — at the confluence of the Patapsco and Chesapeake Bay — had eight platforms ready for 12-inch mortars. Close to the Inner Harbor the Corps mounted 8- and 12-inch guns at Hawkins Point and old Fort Carroll. They also placed mines in the water.

Fortunately, the Spanish fleet never got close enough to feel the effect of Baltimore's defenses. By July 1898 the Spanish military had been crushed, and in August the mines were detonated in a dramatic fireworks display. 🚩

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Office of History.



Photos courtesy National Archives

Unused mines are detonated in Baltimore's harbor.



Hawkins Point during construction of gun emplacements in the spring of 1898 (with Baltimore harbor in the background).